

NEWS ARTICLE

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Summertime Food Safety

Summer's here and the living is easy — fewer schedules to meet, less discipline, more time to relax, have fun and treat yourself. On a typical summer day we are in and out of the refrigerator or cooler, nibbling all day long. Not to mention that the smell of barbecued burgers wafting through the air can really make your mouth water.

In certain situations such as cookouts, the county fair, family reunions and church “dinners on the ground,” you should be cautious about the food you consume.

In order to enjoy the occasion that brings you and yours together, remember it is extremely important to keep your meals safe from bacteria that cause food borne illnesses.

Food poisoning is caused by bacteria that are widely present in land and aquatic environments, on humans, animals and birds. Bacteria in or on food can multiply quickly at warm temperatures (between 60 and 125°F). The bacteria that cause most cases of food borne illness include Salmonella, Staphylococcus Aureus, Clostridium perfringens and Shigella. Some of them cause illness when sufficient numbers are present in food and multiply in the body after we eat the food; others produce toxins in the food that cause illness after we eat them. There are differences among these bacteria in the way illness develops and the time required for symptoms to occur. The symptoms, however, are similar and include severe abdominal cramps and diarrhea, nausea and *sometimes vomiting*. *Healthy adults* will usually recover in a few days, but these illnesses can be life-threatening for the elderly persons, young children or immunocompromised individuals.

When transporting food, it is possible to prevent growth of bacteria by paying attention to temperature control and cleanliness.

✍ Use insulated bags or coolers. Unless the food will be eaten within two hours of cooking or refrigeration, you will need a way to keep it very hot or cold. Insulated bags or coolers are available in many sizes. Use ice or a reusable freeze-pack to keep foods cold for several hours.

✍ Be sure foods are cold or frozen before you place them in the cooler or a cold thermos.

✍ Keep the cooler in the coolest possible place. A car trunk might be the coolest place in the winter, but in the summer, it will be very hot. In hot weather, keep a cooler (or any perishable food) inside the car, preferably on the floor. Keep foods out of direct sun where high temperatures will develop.

✍ Discard any food that has been at room temperature for more than two hours regardless

of what it is or how much it cost. Remember the old saying, "When you can not do it right, do not do it." The cost of the product is not worth the cost for possible medical attention and physical discomfort for you or others to save the item in question.

If you have a question, call Linda Bowman, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, The University of Florida--Santa Rosa County Cooperative Extension Service--IFAS, at (850)623-3868 or (850)939-1259, Ext. 1360 for south county residents, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Hearing impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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